

Tomorrow's Workforce Award Winner:

Supreme Award Winner:

Counties Manukau District Health Board – Health Science Academies

Video Link <https://vimeo.com/104677152>

South Auckland's District Health Board is offering bright Pacific and Maori secondary school students a head start if they're interested in a career in the health sector.

Counties Manukau District Health Board (CMDHB) looks after half a million people – many of whom are Maori or Pacific, and living with poverty. It often struggles to find enough qualified clinicians, let alone those who come from the same culture as many of the patients.

The DHB has taken on a new workforce development that's focused on getting school students interested in pursuing a tertiary education which will lead to a career in the health industry. CMDHB Workforce Consultant, Christine Hanley, explains that in 2010 it set up health science academies in two local secondary schools to help Maori and Pacific students to go on to further education as sometimes they drop out of school early or don't follow through with a tertiary degree or diploma. "We partnered with James Cook High School and Tangaroa College with funding from The Tindall Foundation, while Otahuhu College is working in partnership with the Pasifika Medical Association with funding from the Ministry of Health."

The academies' aims

Christine says the trio of academies has worked collaboratively to develop science curricula with a focus on preparing the students to study for a tertiary health qualification and then move into eventual employment with CMDHB or other health employers in the district. "It is early days as the first cohort of year 11 students entered the academies in 2011." She adds that anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of school students don't understand or have any great awareness of the wide variety of careers in health outside of nursing and medicine. "Also students in south Auckland are not continuing to study science to the levels required to successfully enter and complete a degree in health so they can enter the workforce." Christine says CMDHB's aim is to reflect the region's population in its health workforce. "The development of a 'seamless pipeline' is the aim – which develops local talent into health professionals."

How do the academies work?

The year 11 academy students apply to enter the academies at the end of year 10 and must have demonstrated a good work ethic, self direction and motivation as well as reasonable academic levels. The applicants, who must be Pacific or Maori, are then short listed and interviewed. Christine says there has been lots of student interest in 2010 and 2011 with each school having over 45 applicants for a possible 25 places in each academy. "Currently there are 137 students enrolled in the three academies with 75 year 11 students and 62 year 12s." Once selected they attend four mandatory subject classes including Science, and Health Science. The students are expected to attend up to three extra tutorials a week during term time and in the holidays for revision, study skills and mock exams. Christine says the students' families are fully informed of their children's expected level of commitment to their study. "The family/caregiver also has to agree to promote full participation and ensure the student has the time and space to complete their homework. The schools keep in touch with the parents as well."

Student feedback

Year 11 male student, Otahuhu College: "There are too many Pacific islanders who are obese and I want to help them. I was named after my grandfather who was a doctor in the islands. Maybe one day I will go there and work when I have the information to help."

Year 12 female student, James Cook High: "I'm doing this because of my brother. He has cerebral palsy and it always amazed me how the health professionals help him. I want to do the same and enjoy a challenge."

Year 11 female student, Tangaroa College: "The academy was an opportunity to boost me for my future career so I took it! I want to be a coroner. We get more work than other classes and this is good for our study."

Academy outcomes, so far

The first full year in 2011 was a success. The aim was for 80% of the students to achieve NCEA Level 1, but about 87% reached this with high levels of merit and excellence achieved in external tests. "The three schools are satisfied that the academies are now viable and robust especially as retention of students in the academies has been high - at 85%," says Christine. "Those that left usually did so as they realised they weren't interested in a health career." She says the students now have a sense of direction, are motivated and are more confident. "An unexpected bonus has been that other senior students who are not in the academies are also opting to continue with science subjects. In one school this number has doubled." She says such a promising start means students are well on track to be part of the solution to the health service delivery challenges South Auckland's DHB is facing in the near future.